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SUBJECT: KRAKOW,S PO LEADER PREDICTS PO LOSS

REF: A) WARSAW 2001 B) WARSAW DAILY REPORT 09-28-07

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (U) This cable was drafted by ConGen Krakow.

12. (C) Summary: Krakow,s PO leader (and lead candidate on the PO list), Senator Jaroslaw Gowin, told Poloff on October 5 that his party will probably lose the coming parliamentary elections, both in Krakow and the nation. In Gowin,s view, the key to his campaign lies in the surrounding small villages of Malopolska; he believes that the large student population of Krakow, upon which PO bases so much of its electoral hopes, will not turn out to vote. Gowin is unwilling to consider working in coalition with the Kaczynskis, despite representing himself as the conservative wing of PO. Moreover, Gowin emphasized he could not imagine a PO coalition with Left and Democrats (LiD). Gowin blames Donald Tusk for PO,s electoral fate. Gowin said that Tusk should be replaced if PO loses on October 21. End Summary.

#### THE ELECTION

13. (C) Jaroslaw Gowin is an accidental candidate, made possible by the resignation of former PO leader Jan Rokita. In the immediate aftermath of Rokita,s withdrawal, PO conducted polls to choose a replacement. Gowin, despite only two years of political experience in the Senate, came in ahead of national luminaries Senator Radek Sikorski and Senator Stefan Niesiolowski, as well as former mayor of Krakow, Senator Andrej Golas. In part, Gowin,s popularity stems from his position as Rector of Krakow,s Tischner Institute, in a city of 170,000 university students.

14. (C) In Gowin,s analysis, however, the students will not vote, and success lies elsewhere. The key is in the small villages of the district, where PO,s message of decentralization (as opposed to the overt centralizing policies of Law and Justice (PiS)) has particular resonance with local self-government leaders. But it may not be enough even in Malopolska, where, for a variety of historical and cultural reasons, there is hunger for autonomy from Warsaw. The PiS program of the Fourth Republic, with its anti-corruption element, is quite popular among the same voters Gowin is courting, and he noted the weakness of PO on this issue.

#### COALITIONS

15. (C) For these reasons, Gowin told Poloff, he was pessimistic about coming out ahead of PiS Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro, and he believed that his party,s national prospects are also poor. He saw some small grounds for hope: in 14 of 16 provinces there is already some form of PO-Peasant Party (PSL) coalition - something Gowin views as holding the potential for a natural coalition on the

national level. That said, Gowin himself did not expect to cooperate with PiS in the event of an overture. He dismissed rumors that the conservative wing of PO would cross the aisle, saying, &I am the conservative wing of PO, and I will not work with the Kaczynskis.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, Gowin rejected the characterization of PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski as a threat to democracy, saying, &I know Jaroslaw Kaczynski, and he is a democrat.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Gowin said that he had an even harder time imagining a coalition between PO and LiD.

¶16. (C) Gowin judged that Jan Rokita still has a role to play. He expects that Rokita, along with former PiS PM Kazimierz Marciekiewicz, will form a new organization after the election with an eye towards the 2010 presidential elections. Gowin initially demurred when asked if he would join such a movement. He explained that he had only been a member of PO for two weeks (before that he ran as an independent on the PO list), and that he wants to influence the party from the inside rather than &retreat.<sup>8</sup> When pressed, Gowin admitted that in the event PO collapses, he would be willing to join Rokita. Gowin also approved of the dissident element of PO in local Silesian politics (see Reftel A) and thought they had a prominent role to play in future party leadership.

#### BLAME

¶17. (C) Gowin plainly laid PO,s electoral fortunes on the shoulders of Donald Tusk, and said Tusk would have to be replaced if PO loses on October 21. Gowin reviewed what he saw as a series of failures on the part of PO leadership. He said that PO under Tusk still resembled a civic movement rather than a political party, with few paid election professionals (there are only two on PO staff in Krakow) and

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many enthusiastic but ineffective volunteers. He noted that after the 2005 elections PiS established its own polling organization and internal think tank. Gowin set out to establish a similar think tank for PO, but never received promised funds from Tusk. He concluded that new leaders are necessary, and said that this is Tusk,s last campaign.

#### PROSPECTS

¶18. (C) Comment: Prospects may not be as bad as Senator Gowin believes. For two weeks Gowin had led Ziobro by large percentages in several, admittedly unreliable (see Reftel B), national polls. The day of the interview with Poloff, though, a new poll on the front page of the national daily Gazeta Wyborcza showed Gowin trailing Ziobro for the first time. As well, PiS,s numbers overall were up, in reaction to the October 1 televised debate between PM Kaczynski and former President Alexander Kwasniewski. All this may have contributed to the pessimism of the October 5 interview. The daily Rzeczpospolita published a poll on October 8 showed Gowin once more with a comfortable margin. In our view, the election in Krakow is a toss up.

¶19. (C) The simmering distrust between conservative and liberal wings of PO will spill over if PO loses the elections and faces coalition talks with PiS. Moreover, support for Tusk,s leadership is anemic in the conservative faction of PO, and electoral failure will spark a real battle over succession. End Comment.

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